

## PREFACE

Before we proceed into our next passage I'd like to circle back for just one more point from v1. When in my study I learned that the "knowledge" that is the focus of vv1-3 is "the revealed illumination that comes from the Spirit," I found this to be troubling. After all, how could knowledge that comes by way of the Holy Spirit lead to or produce the arrogance being demonstrated by the Corinthians? This seemed antithetical to me. But Paul confirms this in Chapter Thirteen, where he expands on this contrast between knowledge and love; note especially v2.

**Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.**

What we have here, once again, is an example of the power of fallen flesh to corrupt something so righteous as to come to us from the Father by way of His Spirit. Even something as beautiful as the illumination we receive by the indwelling Holy Spirit can turn sour in the hands of a believer more enamored of himself than his Savior, and his fellow believers. I find that a sobering realization indeed.

**Read 1 Corinthians 8:4-6.**

v4

*Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world,*

Here again we have illustrated for us the reason not to be enslaved to only one translation of God's word. My otherwise trusty NASB translates v4 in such a way that the reader immediately responds with "But wait a minute..."

Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.

To the statement "there is no such thing as an idol in the world," we want to respond with, "But wait a minute, Paul. You just mentioned in v1, and even the beginning of this same sentence that there are things sacrificed to idols—*so they must exist.*" An idol is simply an image of a pagan god, and of course those images exist in the world. To this very day, 2,000 years later, they can still be found.

The other translations handle this better, and to its credit the NASB footnotes the other ways to translate it—something at which the NASB is very good. What we are also seeing here is the Jewish/OT practice of blurring the distinction between a god and its associate idol. The prophet Jeremiah wrote, "Can man make gods for himself? Yet they are not gods!" (Jeremiah 16:20) The word translated "gods" is *elohim*, but if one is crafting it with one's own hands, then what is made is an idol—an image.

We also have here in this verse two more maxims, or slogans, as the 2011 NIV and ESV make clear by placing them in quotes: “an idol has no real existence,” and “there is no God but one.” So Paul is agreeing with the premise: idols are worthless and there is only one true God (*Yahweh*).

*and that there is no God but one.*

This of course echoes the Shema from Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!” That is, “Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one.”

**Sidebar:** I’m struck by the similarity between antagonism to Judaism in the first century and Christianity in the twenty-first. In the first century Judaism was ridiculed by many because of its insistence upon there being only one *God*, and in the twenty-first century Christianity is ridiculed because of its insistence upon there being only one *way* to God—that is, through Christ.

Paul will expand on this in the next verse, but before we get there let’s consider something that is hiding beneath the surface of v4. The Corinthians were saying to Paul. *Hey, these pagan gods do not really exist, so that means their idols mean nothing at all. So what can be the harm in eating any food that has been part of their worship?* But what they are glossing over is that, in a sense, there *is* a reality behind those gods and their images—an even darker reality. We see this in what one psalmist wrote about what happened to Israel because they failed to destroy all the people in Canaan.

**Read Psalm 106:34-39.**

As J. Moffat puts it, idols are nonentities, but demonic powers used idols to inveigle (i.e., cajole) humans into worshiping false gods. Demonic forces are at work, whether we realize it or not, whenever we associate in any way with false gods and their images. Even though the gods do not exist, the demons behind them surely do. They will do anything to pry us away from the true God.

**w5-6**

Verses five and six comprise one long sentence which was split into two verses when the numbers were added to the Bible in the fifteenth century.

*For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth,*

In this long, awkward sentence (even in the Greek), Paul is making two points: Father God is the only true God, but just because they are not real, this does not mean that the pagan gods are harmless.

**Read Galatians 4:7-9.**

Later in this three-chapter treatise the apostle will come down hard on this in no uncertain terms.

### Read 1 Corinthians 10:19-21.

*as indeed there are many gods and many lords,*

In v5, when Paul affirms that there are “so-called gods”—indeed, “many gods and many lords,”—he is not claiming “they ‘exist’ as objective realities,” but that “they ‘exist’ subjectively in the sense that they are believed in” (Fee). When individuals believe in even a nonexistent god, when they worship and make sacrifices to it, and even conduct their lives according to its precepts, that god becomes as “real” to them as he can be.

*yet for us...*

Note how Paul begins his contrast of the pagan with the Christian perception: “yet for us” implies there is a tacit “for them” in v5. *For them there are many gods and lords, but for us there is only one God and one Lord.*

Verse six is an eloquent summation of the God we worship and our relationship to Him through Christ. It supplies for us the script for our response to anyone who challenges us with a different god, a different faith, a different creed. In its two halves Paul chooses his words carefully; here is no sloppy theology.

#### *God, the Father*

*there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him;*

Keying off his earlier reference to “many gods and many lords,” Paul first describes our God as “Father,” conveying that He “is the ultimate origin of all things” (Garland).

**Sidebar:** Even with the beauty with which this is written, it is nonetheless strong and delivered with unequivocal force. A true follower of Christ cannot worship multiple gods—how did that work out for Israel and Judah when they did it? We cannot do that.

Paul sets out three characteristics of our God:

1. **He is our Father.** Israel knew Yahweh as the Father of their nation, but it was Jesus who made this an appellation of personal intimacy—not just for Himself, but extended from Him as a gift to His followers.
2. As our Father, **God is the progenitor of “all things.”** Every human being, every tree in the forest, every planet and star in the universe—all things come from Him and,
3. **We, especially, exist for His purposes.** We not only will return to Him, but we live *for Him* right now.

## *Lord, Jesus Christ*

*and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.*

Then paralleling in form, but not content, the apostle gives us three characteristics of our Lord:

1. **He is our Lord**—our Master, supreme in authority—but also echoing the term used in the Greek OT (Septuagint) for Yahweh Himself, thus implying the deity of Christ and His place in the Godhead.
2. **He is the one through whom God created all things.** Christ Jesus was, as it were, the “agent” through whom creation came into being, as Paul writes in his letter to the Colossians.

**Read Colossians 1:16.** ([stay here](#))

The writer to the Hebrews states it flat-out: “through whom also He made the world” (Hebrews 1:2).

3. **He is the one through whom we are.** Just as Christ was the agent of creation, so too He was the agent of our *redemption*.

**Read Colossians 1:19-20.**

## CONCLUSION

Certain members of the Corinth church were our brethren in more ways than one. Sadly, from our perspective they were quite modern, for they were exhibiting philosophies and behavior that mimic our own—or, more accurately, foreshadowed our own.

Every day we make decisions both large and small that risk diluting the lordship of Christ in our lives. If we took the time to think them through we would realize that some of our choices, while on the surface benign, contain the seeds of a cancer that weaken our faith and our walk.

Paul takes this opportunity—still laying the groundwork for his main point (as he did in vv1-3)—to eloquently drive home the point that for followers of Christ there can be only *one* God and only *one* Lord. We have life and salvation only through them, and we dare not play fast and loose with other “so-called gods,” for ultimately they are *not* harmless, but the face of evil that wishes only to separate us from the God who is Lord over all.